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AUTHOR Rabinovitz, Lauren
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ABSTRACT

The situation comedy (sitcom) as a televisual text specifically encourages one type of decoding through its own encoding. Through the reciprocity of encoding to decoding, feminist sitcoms accord a privileged position to the dominant code, while acknowledging deviance or opposition to it through a highly demarcated female subject position. Relying upon a large intertextual discourse for feminine subject identification, the sitcom articulates to its female audience a feminist subject on the local level while it contains its subject within television hegemony of passive consumerism on the global level. Feminism is a sign of a political practice regarded as oppositional and troublesome in some conservative spheres. Feminism's widescale absorption of social, political, and psychological issues has engendered a community of fractured responses so that there is not one monolithic feminism but many feminisms. Because this model offers a framework of explanation for how polymorphic philosophies united under one rubric may be encoded in a unified discourse, it may also be viewed as a theoretical model which allows for multiple types of decoding in the consumption process. The interpretation of those sitcoms is representative of the television industry's attempt to draw upon feminist consciousness raising as a contextual framework that can be carried out through application of the model. (20 end notes) (CGD)

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Lauren Rabinovitz

"Sit-coms and Single Moms: Feminism and the Politics of TV Family Life"

Paper Presented to the 1986 International Television Studies Conference

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Among American broadcast television practices, the fictional TV situation comedy constructed around a single career woman or mother has emerged since the 1970s as a preferred site for a "feminist" subject position. Such examples as The Mary Tyler Moore Show, One Day at a Time, and Alice are representative of the television industry's attempt to draw upon feminist consciousness raising as a contextual frame. Critics frequently agree that Mary symbolized the independent woman of the 1970s.[1] Others have gone so far as to claim that Alice's subliminal message is "Sisterhood is Powerful" or that One Day At a Time is about television's "first feminist."[2] Periodicals aimed exclusively at female audiences(Ms., Vogue, Teen, McCalls, and Working Woman) have cited Alice, One Day at a Time, and The Mary Tyler Moore Show as exemplary representations of a feminist subject and have hailed Kate and Allie as the progressive outcome of a continuous line of such feminist depiction.[3] But these shows display their socio-political "difference" only within the limitations that reaffirm patriarchal relations, thereby making feminism itself discursively compatible with dominant ideology. Sit-com's independent female characters demonstrate the way in which feminism, a significant radical critique of basic economic/social institutions, can ultimately be subverted and renegotiated as a cultural reaffirmation of the family and of the individual woman's role as a privileged consumer.

Feminist scholarship has already established as a base the ways in which certain television texts either posed or received as feminist redirect independent, assertive female characters into safely traditional female categories. Arguing that narratives of a central female character must ultimately return that character to the conventional narrative structures of family melodrama or heterosexual

romance, critics have demonstrated that a woman's position can only be narratively inscribed in relationship to male prerogatives. For example, both Barbara Klinger and Serafina Bathrick have noted how the narrative trajectory of The Mary Tyler Moore Show textually repositions Mary--the single, professionally-minded independent woman--into romantic or familial categories so that she emerges as a self-sacrificing, nurturant figure of True Womanhood.[4]

Bathrick also demonstrates how popular interviews and articles about Mary Tyler Moore, the actress and producer, further negotiated the star discourse along the same lines. She cites how the press foregrounded Moore's image as a wife and mother -- the opposite of rather than a reflection of her character -- as an important framework for interpreting and accepting Mary's definition inside traditionally female categories.[5] More recently, Kate and Allie has undergone the same treatment. A TV Guide article dated April 26, 1986, places Jane Curtin and Susan St. James -- the actresses who play two urban, independent, single mothers living together-- in a professional context only insofar as their acting careers do not interfere with their duties as wives (and mothers).[6] The structure and direction of the article itself is dependent upon separate interviews with Curtin and St. James that probe the issue of competitiveness between them, counteracting the cooperative spirit and the comraderie of their characters.

Within more fully elaborated models of television institutions and processes, Laurie Schulze has also explored narrative redirection in the made-for-television movie. Schulze argues that narrative strategies as well as the weight of the large intertextual network -- literary, cinematic, and televisual -- activate female protagonists as "meaningful" only within the bounds of romance and family melodrama

and that this practice suppresses that which threatens dominant patriarchal values.[7] Schulze, in particular, develops her argument from a theoretical position put forward by Stuart Hall, David Morley, and others.

Hall and Morley see televisual communication as a complex process of connected practices in which meaning and consumption are not only interdependent but determined through enactments of encoding and decoding. Hall defines the televisual process as a continuous circuit of "production, distribution, production" sustained through a passage of forms.[8] Hall's model provides a basis for understanding how cultural frameworks of knowledge, production relations, and technical infrastructures interact both for the tv product to be realized as a meaningful discourse and, at a differentiated moment, for that product to be received and understood within social practice. Hall's model is especially helpful for understanding how the inscription of feminism in sitcoms is a complicated process of interrelationships among the economic determinants of commercial broadcast television, the discursive language of televisual texts and intertextuality, and the cultural milieu of the 1970s and 1980s.

Although both Hall and Morley argue for the ways that cultural frameworks of reference and other circulating discourses contribute to different decodings of the same message, I would like to emphasize how the sitcom as a televisual text specifically encourages one type of decoding through its own encoding. It is through the reciprocity of encoding to decoding that sitcoms accord a privileged position to the dominant code while acknowledging deviance or opposition to it through a highly demarcated female subject position. Relying upon a large intertextual discourse for feminine subject identification, the sitcom articulates to its female audience a feminist subject on the local

level while it contains its subject within television's hegemony of passive consumerism on the global level.

Feminism -- both as a signifying term of language and as a signified social practice -- was throughout the 1970s and is today a sign of a political practice regarded as oppositionally troublesome in some conservative spheres. Although feminist consciousness raising throughout the 1970s, changing public policy regarding affirmative action and wages in employment, and widespread discussion about the proposed Equal Rights Amendment made certain feminist issues of enormous topical interest, feminism's association with abortion, lesbianism, and the dissolution of the nuclear family have provoked hotly angered responses and protests. Feminism's widescale absorption of social, political, and psychological issues has engendered a community of fractured responses so that there is not one monolithic feminism but many feminisms that run the gamut from radical to liberal to conservative. Because the model outlined above may be used to explain how polymorphic philosophies united under one rubric may be encoded in a unified discourse, it offers a theoretical model which allows for multiple types of decoding in the consumption process.

An illustration of this position occurs in the following interpretation of the debuting scene of Kate & Allie, originally broadcast March 19, 1984. As the title credits roll and the theme music plays, two casually, but well-dressed women in their mid-thirties--Kate and Allie-- walk out of a movie theatre. Centered within the frame, they walk left to a poster of An Unmarried Woman. Together on the right side of the frame, they confront the poster on the left side. Already before the women speak or act, they are coupled with a mass media icon for feminist consciousness. The poster not only denotes a famous movie about a newly divorced woman learning

to be independent and self-assertive but connotes the empathetic response and the identification for a woman's plight that made the movie successful as a woman's discourse and within discourse. But such a connotative reading is only available to those who participated in the discourse of An Unmarried Woman, a movie widely seen and hailed by liberal feminists. Standing on the right, Kate substantiates this subject position: "I still love that movie."

When Allie offers a point-of-view suggesting that she did not empathize, she presents what is a simple contrasting identification between the identified "liberated" woman and the unliberated woman. But the even modulation of the two women's voices, direct eye contact, equally centered positions in the frame belie that difference provides conflict. Such a decoding operates in opposition to the weight of visual media discourse which pitches two women who disagree into competition. But such a decoding draws upon the discourse of An Unmarried Woman itself for its moments of female solidarity among women friends and upon a more ambiguous social frame which duplicates the subject relationship to An Unmarried Woman as one of empathy and understanding.[9]

Allie's refusal to see why Jill Clayburgh did not go off with Alan Bates at the end of the movie is humorous to the spectator who has already adopted the preferred reading of An Unmarried Woman. Allie's position represents a naive belief in romance. The spectator though understands the film's denouement as a representation of self-actualization and decodes this scene through privileging Kate's position as the dominant code.

But visually and verbally weighted equally with Kate, Allie offers a subject position to those who have rejected 1970s's hip feminist consciousness(An Unmarried Woman) without necessarily

rejecting feminist political issues. Allie's very words -- "Hey, he had a loft. I could find myself in a loft. I could find myself in bed with Alan Bates in a loft" -- poke fun at liberated feminism as a contradictory desire to one of female romantic fantasy. While recognizing sexual liberation("I could find myself in bed with Alan Bates"), she asserts the validity of romantic desire and its tradition.

Furthermore, Allie may also be seen as the subject position for a spectator decoding from an oppositional position or frame of reference. Her repetitive emphasis on the words "the loft" signifies the propertied, privileged status of both Bates and Clayburgh, an issue frequently taken up by radical feminist critiques of An Unmarried Woman. When she finishes her line of reasoning regarding Clayburgh's missed opportunity to stay with Bates, she sums up, "...and if he leaves, she gets the loft." Kate's response is "I don't want to go to the movies with you anymore." At this point, Allie doubles as an unwitting accomplice for the feminist spectator who critiqued An Unmarried Woman's ignorance of class issues and makes a joke out of the concept of self-actualization divorced from class.

This example of situation comedy adopts a viewpoint toward feminism as a political philosophy that conforms to what Hall popularly calls "a negotiated position." By encoding feminism as a discourse of self-actualization, Kate's and Allie's scene(like the icon to which it refers) tacitly accepts women's general social conditions and positions while allowing certain exceptional inter-personal relationships for its specific situation.(It is inferred connotatively that feminism on the personal level is two women sharing their time, friendship, and even disagreements.) But the scene transmits such a view of feminism as the dominant or hegemonic

position. If there is an actual process of a negotiated decoding here, it occurs through the spectator who acknowledges yet incorporates oppositional frames of reference at the moment of "reading" both the representation of An Unmarried Woman and Allie's responses. Kate & Allie inscribes a feminism that is necessarily contradictory but decoded as personally satisfying both at the dominant and negotiated positions.

Kate & Allie's structure for incorporating feminism and feminist subject positions derives from an industry-wide attempt beginning in the 1970s to aggressively address women spectators. The evolution of such a generic address as a significant economic determinant occurred because American television executives perceived a need to create demographic audiences that would be more specific targets for advertising agencies. As a result, they actively cultivated homogeneous groups of ethnic, racial, and female minorities. During the early 1970s, American network programming executives cooperated with advertising salesmen to convince advertisers that rating numbers alone did not matter so much as the audience rating composition by sex, age, and income. Fewer customers could look relatively more valuable if they earned more and spent more.[10] Daytime television had for years catered its fiction, formats, and advertising to a specifically homogenous consumer group defined as female, married, and housebound. But primetime television only followed suit when the increasingly specific audience data supplied by the ratings services suggested an economic cultural shift in purchasing power.[11] Foreseeing a national economic shift in consumption stimulated by the baby boom generation coming of age, advertising agencies began earmarking two-thirds of their advertising budgets to address consumers under fifty, and television executives merely followed suit

by catering their products to the "demographics" for which the advertisers were looking.

Television executives expected to accomplish these ends by programming shows that would feature more "liberal" ideas, televisual fictions that would be about younger, more urban characters and that would be more "realistic" because of their marks of racial or gender specificity. Neil Gitlin refers to the ubiquitiousness of such television programming by the middle 1970s as "the turn toward relevance."[12] Another popular book on television labels it "affirmative access," mistakenly conflating the subjects of the fictions with their social audiences.[13] In other words, the term suggests that social audiences of women, blacks, and chicanos had shared life experiences and values being incorporated in the messages of the fictions which thereby allowed them to participate in some meaningful way in television conceived as an ideological mirror of democratic culture. In any event, television programming which attempted to locate women spectators as a significant group of consumers infiltrated the American prime-time schedule.

Between 1975 and 1985, no less than ten half-hour situation comedies focusing on single mothers duplicated certain social, familial, and psychological patterns. Phyllis(1975), One Day at a Time(1976), Alice(1978), I'm A Big Girl Now(1980), Love, Sidney(1981), The Two of Us(1981), Gloria(1982), Goodnight Beantown(1983), and It's Your Move(1984) featured white biological mothers[widowed in some examples but more frequently divorced], their children, and foregrounded male friends or relatives. When the featured male was not a relative, he was necessarily established as an unsuitable sexual mate for the woman through his difference in age, class, political biases, or sexual preference. Narrative and character situations

revolved around mother-child relations, the woman's relationships to work family and domestic family(in some cases, these are overlapped or intersecting), and the woman's internal conflicts as she attempted to "cope" a la An Unmarried Woman[even such titles as I'm A Big Girl Now or One Day at a Time identify the woman's tentative assertiveness].

Such shows owe much to the broad iconographic outlines of the family sitcom popular in the 1950s and 1960s and even more to the single parent sitcoms introduced as a regular generic permutation in the 1960s. In the genre's formulas popular in the 1960s, however, the single parent families--whether constructed around a father or mother -- continued to define the nuclear family in terms of two adults, one of whom fulfilled the domestic-nurturant role and the other who maintained economic proprietorship over the family. Character relationships occurred exclusively within the domestic realm (Bachelor Father, Family Affair, My Three Sons, The Ghost and Mrs. Muir) or alternated familial and professional crisis relationships among domestic and work spaces(The Andy Griffith Show, The Courtship of Eddie's Father, The Lucy Show).

The independent mother sitcoms of the last decade perpetuate the same parameters of a nuclear family structure by incorporating the male friends or relatives as symbolic patriarchs. In these recent examples, the male figures may be more closely identified with the central represented space because they retain an important economic proprietary relationship to it. Alice, for example, ambiguously intertwines professional and familial relationships as well as narrative crises in the dominant represented space of "Mel's Diner," necessitating the inclusion and often intrusion of irascible Mel as the diner's owner, cook, and sole male adult among the cast regulars. Although Alice's apartment appears occasionally as a secondary

domestic space, it becomes an important representational site for narrative action primarily in such episodes when Mel loses the diner and sets up shop in Alice's apartment or when Mel visits, throws his back out, and is forced to take up residence as a domineering invalid in Alice's living room.

In other sitcoms, the struggling independent single mother lives in a home owned and dominated by a patriarchal boss. In Gloria, Archie Bunker's newly divorced "little girl" moves herself and her son in with a grizzled veterinarian played by Burgess Meredith. In I'm A Big Girl Now, Diana Canova's character and her daughter live with Danny Thomas, and his interference in her life as a narrative condition for conflict as well as for reconciliation is balanced by alternating their domestic relationship with her work relationships set in a separate space. Swoosie Kurtz and her fictional daughter live in Tony Randall's(Sidney's) New York apartment in Love, Sidney. Only here, sex role reversals abound because Kurtz's ability to find personal satisfaction as an aspiring actress and breadwinner are less the focal point for narratives than Sidney's identity as an overprotective stay-at-home mother for Kurtz's child. Sidney, who was overtly represented as gay in the show's pilot, becomes in all later episodes a signifier of gay cliches and stereotypes.

A further exploration of the relationships among the independent female, the proprietary male, and the male's iconographic and narrative inscription in One Day at a Time demonstrates the ways in which the feminism posed by the liberated moms of the 1970s operates only within parameters governed by traditional social relationships as well as sexual representation. For example, the character configuration of Ann Romano, her two teenage daughters, and Dwayne Schneider as the superintendent for their apartment building is

encoded and overdetermined by the opening credit sequence repeated for each episode.[14] With the show's theme song as a soundtrack, a series of cinematic long and medium shots introduce Ann Romano and her two daughters arriving curbside with their car and an attached trailer filled with their possessions. In a separate shot within the same geographic space, David Kane(played by Richard Masur)[who is a regular part of the cast only in the first season as Ann's neighbor and love interest] sits in the driver's seat of his car and reacts as Ann's car bumps into his. Each time a medium shot is introduced of an individual, the actor's name appears on the screen.

As the song swings into the beginning of its chorus, the visual image cuts to a completely different space and centrally frames Schneider in a hallway as he opens a door with his pass key. He quickly shuts the door and pretends to be painting the doorframe as Ann and her two girls circle around him. There is a cut to his reaction shot as he looks off-screen right in the direction of the departing women. Not only is Schneider given authority by being introduced last in a separate setting that visually emphasizes his physical presence rather than his action within the show's exterior environment, but he becomes exceptionalized as the sole bearer of the male gaze directed at the show's heroine. The final shot in the sequence reflects back to Schneider's position of authority as he enters last into a wide establishing shot of Ann's apartment interior where the other introduced figures move about while Schneider surveys the scene from a central position in the rear doorway.

A description of narrative and iconographic strategies for the duration of an entire episode further demonstrates the way in which male authority is encoded. The episode chosen is neither exceptional nor singular for its style, theme, presentation, or mode of address.

It was selected chiefly for its early appearance sequentially in the show's chronology and its foregrounding of sexual liberation which has only been alluded to here as a tacit assumption for these sitcoms.

In this episode, 16-year old daughter Julie tells Ann that she is thinking of having sex with her boyfriend. The initial issues that Julie's ambivalence express to her mother are: is sexual liberation moral? does it extend to 16-year olds? what will Julie decide to do? what will Ann say? Their conversation occurs in the living room that is the established primary narrative site of representation, and Ann receives greater visual weight and emphasis than does Julie. Ann's response to Julie's uncertainty includes humor about how her mother would have ineptly handled this situation and her past experience with Julie's father. Although momentarily poised as an issue for discussion, sexual propriety and mores quickly become suppresssed as the main issue for discussion. As Ann progressively expresses greater concern about what advice she should offer as a mother, the narrative conflict shifts from the morality of sexual freedom for 16 year olds and what Julie will decide to how Ann as a liberated mother will handle the situation.

In the next scene, Ann and boyfriend David discuss the situation in the same space. Their conversation allows narrative repetition -- a device built into much of television's dramatic structure thereby ensuring that only intermittent attention will still guarantee narrative sense. But, more importantly, it advances the narrative because it gives Ann the opportunity to acknowledge and to reenforce what the narrative has already posed -- her uncertainty over how to handle the situation.

Once Ann admits her tentativeness, the doorbell rings, and almost simultaneously, Schneider opens the door in the background. If Ann

expresses uncertainty, Schneider's expected entrance because he is a regular feature of the program appears as an overdetermined contrast -- the site of machismo bravado. Schneider's entrance is accompanied by audience applause and the actor's pause as he waits for the applause to subside, further privileging the moment within the conventions of televisual style.

In this instance, Schneider also comments on how this particular entrance differs from similarly timed entrances on other episodes. Since he usually intrudes by using the pass key attached to the center of his tool belt, he describes both the reenforcement and exceptional nature of this entrance, "You can't get mad. I rang before I used the pass key," and he touches the key dangling from the belt draped across his hips. His privileged interruption, a regular feature of the sitcom, reenforces its position by immediately referring inter-textually to all other entrances on all other episodes of One Day at a Time.

Once Schneider has arrived and named the pretext for his presence(in this case, measuring for new curtain rods), he offers to help with Ann's personal problem and stumbles on to what it is. When Julie enters the living room and Schneider makes a smart remark about her dilemma, Julie explodes in anger that her mother has betrayed her secret and impulsively decides to sleep with her boyfriend that very night. The scene ends with a close up of Ann in consternation. Not only do Schneider's actions humorously comment upon the narrative. But his presence and verbal participation precipitate further narrative action since it is his thoughtless implication that Ann has violated a mother-daughter trust that directs the cause and effect sequence of events.

In the next scene, the original issue regarding frank sexual discussion and morals for teenage girls re-emerges as younger daughter Barbara and David talk while doing the dishes. But, it has been relegated to a non-political delaying tactic of humorous one-liners. Julie and Ann enter the room, reiterate the dilemma, and once they are grouped with David on the living room sofa, David volunteers to talk to Julie's boyfriend in order to convince him to stop putting sexual pressure on Julie. The first solution to the problem in the guise of David offers a potential resolution to the question of: what will Julie do? But it reneges on the issue of how Ann will handle the problem by abdicating her responsibility in favor of David.

But David's potential solution carries little narrative authority with it. As soon as it is posed as a resolution, it is undercut by David's and Ann's subsequent conversation in which Ann shifts the focus to David's personal dilemma, "Do you think you can handle this?" As soon as David reiterates the same kind of tentativeness that Ann expressed -- in effect, doubling and renegotiating her personal dilemma as a liberal rather than a womanly one, the doorbell rings, and Schneider again enters at the moment when he best serves as a smart aleck contrast to uncertainty. But now present under the pretext of installing the curtain rods, he offers through his swagger, costume, and speech an overly determined masculine contrast to another gentler man rather than to a petite, spunky woman. He verbally offers an alternative solution of physical confrontation which he presents evenly framed with David in the background while, watching their verbal repartee, Ann smiles foregrounded within the same frame.

Schneider leaves, and David escorts Julie's entering boyfriend to the bathroom. In a scene done largely in a two-shot, the two males try to find comfortable positions in a mise-en-scene overloaded with

feminine signifiers. Accessories throughout the room are pink, frilly, or furry; lingerie dangles from hooks in the background. In the feminized space, they talk about Julie's feelings, presumably communicating in a conventionalized feminine encoding that combines mise-en-scene, the technical presentation of a tete-a-tete, and signifying language of emotional needs.

The male agreement made in female rather than male discursive terms that the boyfriend will stop pressuring Julie is immediately undercut by a switch to Julie and the boyfriend grappling on a living room couch. Following this visual negation of David's solution, David's ineffectuality as a feminized parental figure for resolving the dilemma is further reenforced. In a medium two shot of David and Ann on her couch, David confidently tells Ann not to worry about Julie. Ann expresses that she is worried. Without any logical reason and solely on the basis of her emotions, Ann adopts the traditionally correct maternal stance at the single moment in the narrative when it is the logical outcome of the knowledge of events that the spectator possesses.

At this moment, Julie enters and initially creates the impression that she did have sex with her boyfriend. But, following the pattern of reversals, she then indicates in a series of shot-reverse shots which spatially separate Julie from David and Ann on the couch that she stood up for herself, did not abdicate, and that neither Ann nor David were of any help in this matter. Through no narrative direction of Ann's, Julie suddenly represents that the correct position is to act on what "she wants." The scene ends with David and Ann exchanging glances and then a final close up of Ann as she says, "Barbara's next."

If the deflected issue of what will Julie do is ultimately resolved as the simultaneous outcome and discovery of self-worth and self-actualization, its only motivation in the narrative itself comes from the model of Ann Romano's ongoing position as the subject and not from Ann's narrative role. Ann Romano's credentials as a feminist seem to extend solely to her visual and narrative importance when acknowledging the tentative nature of her ability to cope, an emotional ambivalence further heightened when she both enlists support and turns down advice from her male friends. Ann's narrative role which resolves around the presentation of how she will function as a mother reconciles her to maternal survival without resolving her desire for emotional control and direction. As Jane Feuer bluntly said, "The 1970s sitcoms dealt with liberal messages within a narrative form limited by its conservatism."[15] Ann Romano operates in a pattern of passive resistence --inscribed visually and narratively -- when examined in relationship to the trajectory of the narrative and to the sympathetic male figures' more active direction and control of the events, rhythms, and flow.

When Kate & Allie appeared in 1984, what distinguished it from the pack of independent mom sitcoms represented by One Day at a Time was that it was about two divorced mothers living together. The male friend or relative necessary to the familial structure of the 1970s sitcoms was replaced by a woman. In the early episodes, however, Kate's inability to cook is narratively interjected in various ways at least once an episode while it is similarly repeated that she works at a travel agency and owns the home she shares with Allie. Kate thus assumes the proprietary position over both the central domestic space and masculine prerogatives traditionally associated with the male figure. Meanwhile, Allie is shown preparing complicated meals, menu

planning, wallpapering, wielding gourmet cooking utensils, all of which attest to her skills as a homemaker and her position in the traditional domestic nurturant role. Once these character differences are established through such repetitions, however, their articulations are both softened and diminished.

Thus, within such traditional iconographic patterns, Kate & Allie suggests that its novelty resides more accurately in doubling the female position that seeks self-actualization. In this way, the characters may be encoded interchangeably so that either may assume the now intertextually feminist passive-resistant role in relationship to the other's narrative direction. Producer Bill Persky even describes the show using terms which suggest that, if this is the case, it bears a remarkable ideological likeness to Ann Romano's representation of a feminist position, "The situation of 'Kate & Allie' is a halfway house -- a respite, not a life goal. But within that, it's... about learning to be yourself so you can be with someone else out of choice--not desperation."[16] Women who asumme either traditional roles or male-identified/"liberated" roles now come to define their lives and crises in the terms of An Unmarried Woman's quest.

There are clearly both synchronic and diachronic factors outside the textual argument that mitigate the conclusions drawn from any one textual example. It is important to note that the presentation of the text occurs within a televisual framework that includes interjected commercial advertisements, promotions for other fictional programming, news announcements as well as simultaneous kinds of material on other channels. For example, the Kate & Allie debut scene already analyzed is followed by an advertisement for the real estate company of Century 21 in which the oral and visual image of home is exploited for its

denotative and connotative values. When the fiction continues, it does so with what is now a routinely used exterior shot of Kate and Allie's townhouse; but the shot's pivotal position in the first narrative episode through its relationship to its preceeding commercial interjects into the narrative added meaning. There is already a body of scholarship that amplifies the inter-relationships between fictional segments and commercial advertisements suggesting that a televisual discourse of "passive feminism" may answer its own characters' "lack" with commercials for a variety of products that promise the kind of personal and maternal fulfillment that the fiction's subjects seek.[17]

It is equally important to place the single example within an evolution of the text's production and reception, which in the case of One Day At a Time stretches out for more than a decade. Characters disappear, appear, and change while generic styles evolve and different extra-textual references are activated. Cast member Mackenzie Phillips' drug problems received such widespread publicity that although some critics likened them to character Julie's problems growing up, she was eventually fired from the show.[18]

But the televisual discourse for a feminist subject has not structurally or ideologically changed much across either the duration of Ann Romano's role in One Day at a Time or the distance from One Day at a Time to Kate & Allie. After surviving repetitive "can she cope" situations, Ann eventually gets a developing career in advertising as well as a series of professional relationships that culminate in romance with one partner, her own advertising agency, and a competitive female partner in the last years of the show.[19] But her role in the narrative alters only to the degree that she functions over time in relationship to different David-like boyfriends and

evolves from crises constructed around "can she cope?" to "how will she find fulfillment?" Kate & Allie's narrative premise reiterates Ann Romano's as producer Bill Persky alluded recently when he said that it is about two women who had sadly discovered that happily ever after does not exist.[20] Like the female sitcoms that preceded it, Kate & Allie continues to define feminism as self-fulfillment through individual decision-making and consumerism for self-improvement. Such an encoding neutralizes a radical political philosophy by transforming social practice into personal or individual terms. In this manner, single mom sitcoms contribute to television's hegemonic practices absorbing feminism in order to reassert the importance of a woman's economic role as the family's primary consumer.

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1 See, for example: Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981), p. 475; Les Brown, Les Brown's Encyclopedia of Television (New York: New York Zoetrope, 1982), p. 282; Rick Mitz, The Great TV Sitcom Book (New York: Perigee Books, 1983), p. 261.

2 Mitz, p. 383 and p. 365.

3 See, for example: Susan Horowitz, "Life With 'Kate & Allie:' The Not-So-Odd Couple on TV," Ms. Vol. 13, No. 3 (September 1984), pp. 32-33.

4 Barbara Klinger, "The Structure and Function of Situation Narrative: An Analysis of 'The Mary Tyler Moore Show" (paper presented at the Society for Cinema Studies Conference, Madison, Wisconsin, 30 March 1984); Serafina Bathrick, "The Mary Tyler Moore Show: Women at Home and at Work," in MTM: 'Quality Television,' ed. Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr, and Tise Vahimagi (London: British Film Institute, 1984), pp. 99-131.

5 Bathrick, pp. 101-102.

6 Kathleen Fury, "Are Kate and Allie Such Good Friends Off-Screen?" TV Guide (April 26, 1986), pp. 26-30.

7 Laurie Jane Schulze, "Getting Physical: Text/Context/Reading and the Made-for-Television Movie," Cinema Journal 25, 2 (Winter 1986), pp. 35-50.

8 Stuart Hall, "Encoding/decoding," in Culture, Media, Language, ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe & Paul Willis (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1980), pp. 128-138; also see: Dave Morley, "Texts, readers, subjects," in Culture, Media, Language, pp. 163-173.

9 See: Annette Kuhn, Women's Pictures: Feminism and the Cinema (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 131-140, for a discussion on the discourses of Hollywood's new women's films that includes An Unmarried Woman.

10 See Todd Gitlin, Inside Prime Time (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), pp. 203-220.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Harry Castleman and Walter J. Podrazik, Watching TV: Four Decades of American Television (New York: McGraw-Hill Paperbacks, 1982), p. 254.

14 For purposes of analysis, I am using the opening credit sequence from the show's first season.

15 Jane Feuer, "Melodrama, Serial Form and Television Today," Screen 25:1 (January-February 1984), p. 16.

16 Bill Persky, quoted in Susan Horowitz, p. 33.

17 For a general discussion on the issues of tv intertextuality between fiction and advertisement, see: Mimi White, "Crossing Wavelengths: the Diegetic and the Referential Imaginary of American Commercial Television," Cinema Journal 25, 2 (Winter 1986), pp. 51-64;

for a more specific interaction, see: Sandy Flitterman, "The Real Soap Operas: TV Commercials," in Regarding Television, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1983), pp. 84-96.

18 Mitz, p. 368.

19 In the last few episodes in which the familiar familial structure had achieved byzantine twists -- daughter Barbara and her husband lived with sister Julie's husband and baby and Ann's mother in the central representational domestic space -- Ann Romano got relegated to the sidelines when she remarried and overturned the narrative premise on which the show was based. Once all the characters moved out of the apartment building, the pretexts for Schneider's appearances became increasingly contrived, and the fiction actually ended with Ann and her husband moving to London in order to advance her career in advertising. The final closure consisted of Ann's and Schneider's farewell hug and Ann's departure from the empty space of her apartment.

20 Fury, p. 26.